1: Lee H-5 (no date) 1949 EE1 Bulgaria EE1
Yugoslavia EF1

p. 604

XXVII

BULGARIA AND YUGOSLAVIA

DWIGHT E. LEE

Introduction

B-Y 727 648 BULGARIA and Yugoslavia emerged from the war of 1914-1918 in contrasting positions—the one a defeated power and the other a victor. This situation, a repetition of that following the Second Balkan War only six years before, helped to perpetuate a feeling of rivalry and bitterness toward each other. Both nations, however, faced serious political and economic problems at home which were far from satisfactorily settled when the war of 1939-1945 caught them up again and threw them once more on opposite sides of the struggle.

Bulgaria[1]

B 727 643 668 The military collapse of Bulgaria in September, 1918, was followed shortly afterward on October 4 by the abdication of Tsar Ferdinand and the succession of Boris III. Although the pro-German premier, Radoslavov, had resigned some months before, his successors who signed the armistice were unable to stem the current of discontent and disillusionment caused by wartime suffering and the prospect of a severe peace. Accordingly, in the elections of August, 1919, the leftist Agrarian party won a significant victory under the leadership of Alexander Stambolisky who had gone to jail for three years because of his opposition to entry into the war and, upon his release in 1918, had sought to set up a republic. Of peasant stock, he was the embodiment of the hopes for a new era held by the Bulgarian farmers who constituted nearly 80 per cent of the population. After

000

113

[1] The best studies on contemporary Bulgaria are the following: A. Bulatsel, *Ocherki sotsialno-politicheskoi zhizni Bolgarii* (Moscow, 1925); K. Dimitriev, *Bolgariya* (Moscow, [illegible]41); A. Girginov, *Ot voĭnata kŭm mir* (Sofia, 1937); T. Girginov, *Istoricheski razvoĭ na savremenna Bŭlgariya* (2 v.; Sofia, 1934-1935); N. Iliev, *Boris III, tsar na Bŭlgaritĕ* (Sofia, [illegible]36); A. P. Malinov, *Stranichki ot nashata nova politicheska istoriya* (Sofia, 1938); N. D. [illegible]kov, *Aleksandŭr Stambolĭĭski. Lichnost i idei* (Sofia, 1930); N. Stanev, *Istoriya na nova Bŭlgariya, 1878-1928* (Sofia, 1929); K. Todorov, *Politička istorija savremene Bugarske* (Belgrad, 1938). Sources in Slavic languages have been supplied by Professor C. E. Black of Princeton University.

becoming premier in October, 1919, Stambolisky's first task was that of signing the peace terms drawn up by the victorious Allies.

The Treaty of Neuilly, November 27, 1919, reduced Bulgaria to a smaller area than it had held before the First Balkan War of 1912 and imposed new burdens. Bulgaria lost the Aegean coast (Western Thrace) to Greece, southern Dobruja to Romania, and strips of land on the west to Yugoslavia. The army was limited to a total of 20,000. Reparations amounting to $450,000,000 were to be paid in thirty-seven years, beginning in 1921. The existence of Bulgarian minorities in all the neighboring states furnished a basis for revisionism which steadily grew, particularly after the rise of fascism throughout Europe in the thirties.[2] The provision for an exchange of populations with Greece greatly heightened the volume of refugees who streamed into Bulgaria, adding to the political ferment and economic burdens of the country. In these and other ways, the settlement exacerbated conditions under which radicalism throve.

Stambolisky won a commanding position in the parliamentary elections of March, 1920, and proceeded to ride roughshod over both the middle class and conservative parties on the right and the Communists on the left. He instituted a number of reforms, including a land law designed to break up the crown lands and larger estates, the imposition of a heavy income tax, and the establishment of a compulsory labor service which in the first four years of operation secured the equivalent of five million wage days of work for the Ministries of Public Works and Railways. In foreign policy he sought to fulfill the treaties and to effect a reconciliation with Yugoslavia among whose Communist and Agrarian parties his concepts of Slavic federation found support. His dictatorial methods, however, won him enemies on all sides, not least among them being the Macedonians who opposed his policy of rapprochement with Yugoslavia. In June, 1923, he was overthrown by a *coup d'état* organized by a group of intellectuals, led by Professor Tsankov, and the League of Army Reserve Officers, among whom Colonels Velchev and Georgiev were leaders. A few days later Stambolisky was assassinated.

Following the Stambolisky regime, the Tsankov government (1923-26) represented a swing to the right. "Communist" insurrections and violence were suppressed with great severity. The increased activity of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) caused difficulties at home and abroad, although after the assassination of its leader Alexandrov (1924) it was split into two factions under Protoguerov and Mihailov who became bitter rivals. A threat of war with Greece arose, but was averted by the action of the League of Nations. A more conciliatory government

[2] See G. P. Genov, *Bulgaria and the Treaty of Neuilly* (Sofia, 1935).

1: Lee H-5 (no date) 1949 EE1 Bulgaria EE1
Yugoslavia

642 under Liapchev (1926-31) sought to reduce party strife and international
668 friction. It secured a loan from the League of Nations to help in the settlement of refugees, but seemed powerless to prevent raids upon neighboring states by the IMRO which, after the assassination of Protoguerov in 1928, was dominated by Mihailov who openly defied the Sofia government and virtually reigned supreme in some frontier districts. The elections of June, 1931 brought a shift again to the left. The cabinets of Alexander Malinov and his successor, Nikola Mushanov, both of whom were Democrats representing middle class and intellectual groups, were supported by the Agrarians. This coalition found itself threatened by the rise of the Communist party which nearly captured a majority in the Sofia municipal elections of September, 1932. In the communal elections of November, however, the Agrarians and Democrats won a victory which emboldened them in an attempt to suppress both the Communists and the Macedonians in the following year.

● 643 Meanwhile Tsar Boris III, had steadily gained in authority and influ-
669 ence. The rapprochement with Italy signalized by the marriage of Boris to
642 the daughter of King Victor Emmanuel III in 1930, and the part played by the Tsar in steps taken toward reconciliation with Yugoslavia and Romania (1933-34) helped to bring him to the fore. Then a series of domestic events enabled the Tsar to make himself a virtual dictator. Colonel Velchev, secretary of the Military League founded in 1930, and Kimon Georgiev, prominent in *Zveno* which was a fascistic civilian organization working for reform and a "strong" government, again helped to stage a *coup d'état,* May, 1934, ousting the Democratic-Agrarian Coalition and making Georgiev premier of a dictatorial government with Velchev as his principal adviser. Parliament was dismissed and political parties dissolved by decree. Vigorous action was taken against IMRO, forcing Mihailov to flee. Most of the promises of the new government, however, and especially the solution of the financial crisis, remained unfulfilled. Velchev's known hostility toward Boris III and his alleged republicanism alienated older army circles which helped to supplant Georgiev by General Zlatev who had the backing of the Tsar. Continued financial mismanagement and a reaction within the army itself to its political activities paved the way for a return to civilian government and the dissolution of the Military League after several of its members, including Velchev, had been convicted of conspiracy. This left Boris III master of the situation, although he proclaimed his intention of restoring constitutional rule.

646 Since the anomolous political situation within the country brought an
666 inevitable reaction against the regime, elections for a new *sobranie* were

The War of 1939-1945

Jockeying for Position

When the European war broke out in September, 1939, the conditions in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia were not dissimilar. In each country a semi-dictatorial government, primarily responsible to the monarch, ruled with the assent of a subservient parliament. The predominantly agrarian masses were discontented with both political and economic conditions but were inarticulate and ineffectively organized. While all former political parties had been officially dissolved, their members continued to carry on a half-concealed activity beneath the eyes of the censor and the political police. The economy of each country was tied, in the main, to Germany's; although in Bulgaria, Great Britain and France made a pretense at counteracting German influences, they had apparently abandoned Yugoslavia to the Axis. In foreign relations both governments officially pursued a policy of neutrality, while their ministers and rulers made open or surreptitious visits to Hitler or his henchmen. German "tourists" ceaselessly worked in each country for the benefit of the German Reich.

Beneath the surface, however, there were forces which caused Bulgaria and Yugoslavia to take different courses when the crucial test came. In Yugoslavia resistance to collaboration with the Axis sprang up the minute the government capitulated. In Bulgaria, on the other hand, the government was able to swing the country into the Axis camp and keep it there until the triumph of the United Nations and particularly Russia made it clear that the Axis was losing the war.

As late as February, 1940, the Bulgarian government[5] assured the members of the Balkan Entente that it would not press its revisionist claims while the war lasted. With the dismemberment of Romania, however, in the summer of 1940, Bulgaria considered itself absolved of this pledge and in September obtained Southern Dobruja, thus regaining the boundary of 1912. Although Romania and Hungary were persuaded in November to adhere to the Tripartite Pact of Germany, Italy, and Japan, and despite the fact that over 80 per cent of Bulgaria's trade was now being carried on with Germany, the tsar and his government refused to join the Axis. Russia, whose agreement with the Reich in August, 1939, had undoubtedly helped to confuse the Bulgarian people, may have had something to do

[5] In well-managed elections, January, 1940, the government obtained a *sobranje* composed of 140 supporters and 20 opponents of whom 9 were Communists. A new government, organized on February 16, was headed by Bogdan Filov who remained premier until he entered the Regency Council in September, 1943.

000 to force, may be relied on for the process of government, then it will be time to revert to democratic forms. As L. T. Hobhouse remarks: „If the institutions are sensibly above the intellectual and moral capacity of a people they will break down; if below, they will be broken up." The former phenomenon has occurred of late in most European countries which have adopted too prematurely Parliamentarism They are reverting to simpler forms more in harmony with their mental standing and degree of social development, both of which have markedly deteriorated since the world war. We may be confident that when these communities recover their former psychical health, or attain a more mature state of development and find that dictatorial forms of government are sensibly below their mental capacity, they will break them up and regain a just equilibrium.

643 It would be apposite to add a few lines on some of the patriotic men who undertook on May 19, 1934 the Herculean task of cleansing Bulgaria's Augean stables, for all are equally unassuming and modest, with a profound aversion for the limelight. M. Kimon Gheorghiev had already acted as Minister of Railways in the Liaptsev Cabinet (1926-1931) and owing to his strong disapproval of the financial policy of the government, resigned in protest. This, for a Bulgarian Minister is something untoward; usually their consciences are so elastic that they always manage to jog along together however much they may differ among themselves. It is they, who long before their British colleagues of 1932, evolved the doctrine of the Cabinet's agreement to differ! They only resign in a body and when such resignation is imposed by force of circumstances. In the political annals of Bulgaria there are remarkably few instances of Ministers resigning on a question of principle. The explanation which M. Gheorghiev gave in the Sobranye on Feb. 19, 1929, as to the reasons which

643 compelled him to take this step is characteristic not only of the high spirit of public duty which inspires his acts, but also of the consciousness of his responsibilities when in charge of public affairs. One or two sentences of the speech, suffice to portray the man. „It is," M. Gheorghiev declared, „a nefarious act to allow the public to perceive that the State shows partiality in its treatment of its subjects, and to favour some unduly at the expence of others... The sense of justice is being blunted, and such acts must cease"... and as they did not cease, M. Gheorghiev turned his back on his former colleagues and resigned, while the latter persevered in their campaign of spoliation and embezzlement.

645 663 As for M. Peter Todorov, the writer has nothing to alter in the opinion he expressed of him in a letter to the *Manchester Guardian* on Oct. 6, 1923, the object of which was to correct and mitigate the erroneous impressions the British public was forming of events in Bulgaria owing to the reports of some three misinformed Labour members of Parliament, who had then visited the country. This appreciation of M. Todorov was couched in the following terms: „No words would adequately express the esteem in which he is rightly held by those who have the privilege to know him. His unsparing denunciation of the abuses committed by the former Agrarian government and his scathing exposures of shady affairs are the best proof of his unswerving devotion to high ideals. As long as M. Todorov remains in the Cabinet there can be no fear of Bulgaria pursuing a reactionary policy". To the above may be added M. T. G. Vlaikov's appreciation, so that it may not be thought that such flattering remarks are inspired by the personal esteem the writer cherishes for one of the most stalwart champions of true radicalism in Bulgaria. M. Vlaikov is a distinguished writer, and a political thinker who until lately had played an active and reputable part

lace favourite, and General Russev, the Minister of the Interior. Impartial politicians in Bulgaria generally absolve Tsankov of this violence. Thus, M. Muchanov speaking in the Sobranye on April 1, 1926 stated: 661

„1924 and 1925 were not normal years. Never before had we such internal unrest and such fratricidal struggles in Bulgaria. I understand the mentality of those who were administering the country at the time. In many cases they carried out their duty in a worthy manner, but at many placed certain exaggerations occurred, but I personally, shall abstain from blaming the Minister of the Interior for these."

And the Radical leader Kosturkov, who was one of the most outspoken critics of the Tsankov administration equally admitted in the Sobranye on December 21, 1926: „The Tsankov Government had been provoked by the Agrarians and Communists and the blood it shed was in self-defence".

The advent of the Liaptchev administration coincided with the temporary exhaustion of the Agrarians and for some time relative tranquillity prevailed which permitted the Government to devote its attention to the pursuance of its financial programme and the raising of loans, which can hardly be said to have aided the country, as may be inferred from a perusal of the chapter devoted to the story of the League of Nation's loans[1] 643 •

Another act by which this administration is likely to be remembered was the voting in 1929 of a large amnesty which included Radoslavov and Tontchev, rightly condemned by a State Court for violating the Constitution and facilitating Tsar Ferdinand's efforts to plunge Bulgaria into the war on the side of the Central Powers in opposition to the manifest desire of the people. The other colleagues of Radoslavov had already benefited from a previous amnesty, but public opinion at the time was utterly opposed to the inclusion in it of these two ex-Ministers. By granting an amnesty to these two discredited politicians who 643 697

[1] Cf. cat. 110, pp. 84–118 — Analyst]

had stopped at no crime in order to further their nefarious designs, the Government dealt a heavy blow to the prestige of Justice and undermined among the people confidence in law and morality. The real aim of the Goverment in passing this measure was to emancipate itself from the threat of finding itself placed in a minority through the defection of its more idealistically minded supporters, who very often disapproved of its policy By winning over the partisans of Radoslavov by the grant of an amnesty to their leaders, the Government was hoping that it would ward off such a threat by eventually replacing their disgruntled followers by the Radoslavovists. Apparently the moral code of the trinity at the head of the government was not a very strict one as is manifest from the financial policy it foisted on the country and the liabilities it so lightheartedly assumed.

The commuting of punishments, and the granting of amnesties does not seem to have appeased either the Agrarians or the Communists, for towards the end of 1929 there was a distinct recrudescence in their activities. Armed bands penetrated from Yugoslavia and committed depredations and murders. A train was stopped and the passengers robbed, a number of judges were arrested and brutally shot near Sevlievo, the leader of the criminal band, responsible for these crimes, the notorious Dontso Uzunov, later took refuge in France, and though the Bulgarian Government applied for his extradition, this was refused on the pretext that the crime committed was of a political character. The Government and its supporters paid little heed to the needs of the country, they were too intent on dividing among themselves the spoils of office. The booty was abundant, as it had been increased by the foreign loans recently concluded and there was enough for all their hungry followers. Millions were being showered upon prominent supporters of the Government